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Applicant(s): **Ronald L. Carr**

Docket No.

P 97 194.024

Serial No.

08/952.001

Filing Date

November 7, 1997

Examiner

A. Pickard

Group Art Unit

3626

Invention:

JOINT ASSEMBLY EMPLOYING MULTI-RING GASKET



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P 97 194.024

In Re Application Of: Ronald L. Carr

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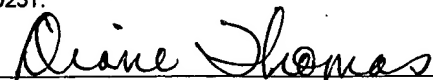
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Applicant:

Ronald L. Carr

Group Art Unit: 3626

Serial No.: 08/952,001

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Diane Thomas
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900 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 1925
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August 24, 2001

APPEAL BRIEF

Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences
Washington DC 20231

Greetings:

This Appeal Brief is being filed in connection with the final rejection of the above-captioned patent application, mailed April 9, 2001 (Paper #20).

The real party in interest is KC Multi-Ring, Inc.

There are no related appeals or interferences.

Claims 55, 60 - 62, 66 - 69, 73 - 78, 82 - 85, and 87 stand rejected.

STATUS OF AMENDMENTS

No Amendment was filed subsequent to final rejection.

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Page 1 - APPEAL BRIEF (08/952,001)

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SUMMARY OF INVENTION

The invention of claim 55 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

55. A gasket (e.g., 70 at page 15, line 29, Figure 11) for providing a seal at the joint between a pair of pipe flanges (e.g., 12 and 16 at page 9, lines 7 - 8, Figure 5) for connecting one flange to the other, comprising:

a first strip of a material that is adapted for sealing and formed in a loop and having an outer periphery (e.g., 72 at page 15, line 30, Figure 11);

a second strip of said sealing material formed in a loop and having an inner periphery that is greater than the outer periphery of said first strip (e.g., 74 at page 15, line 31, Figure 11); and

at least one spoke of said sealing material extending between said first strip and said second strip wherein remaining spaces therebetween are substantially void (e.g., 77 at page 15, line 32, Figure 11).

The invention of claim 60 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

60. A gasket (e.g., 92 at page 16, line 15, Figure 13 or 70 at page 15, line 29, Figure 11) for providing a seal at the joint between a pair of pipe flanges (e.g., 12, 16 at page 9, lines 7 - 8, Figure 5) for connecting one flange to the other, comprising:

a first strip of a material that is adapted for sealing which is formed in a loop and has an outer periphery (e.g., 72 at page 15, line 30, Figure 13 or 74 at page 15, line 31, Figure 11);

a second strip of said sealing material formed in a loop and having an inner periphery that is greater than the outer periphery of said first strip (e.g., 74 at page 15, line 32, Figure 13 or 76 at page 15, line 31, Figure 11); and

at least one spoke of said sealing material extending between said first strip and said second strip (e.g., 77 at page 15, line 32, Figure 13 or 78 at page 15, line 34, Figure 11), the gasket further comprising an open alignment spoke of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip (e.g., 94 at page 16, line 17, Figure 13), said open alignment spoke defining an alignment concavity (e.g., 96 at page 16, line 18, Figure 13) for placement adjacent a fastener.

The invention of claim 61 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

61. The gasket of claim 60, further comprising a centering shelf (e.g., 162 at page 19, line 8, Figure 24) of said sealing material depending from said open alignment spoke and extending so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of at least one of the flanges (e.g., 164 at page 19, line 11, Figure 24).

The invention of claim 62 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

62. The gasket of claim 61, wherein the flanges have corresponding inner and outer peripheries, wherein the outer periphery of one of the flanges is smaller than the outer periphery of the other of the flanges (e.g., 164, 166 at page 19, line 11, Figure 24), wherein the outer periphery of said second strip (e.g., 152 at page 18, line 37, Figure 24) is substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the smaller flange (164 at page 19, line 11, Figure 24), and wherein said centering shelf extends so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the larger flange (166 at page 19, line 11, Figure 24).

The invention of claim 66 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

66. The gasket of claim 60, wherein said first (e.g., 76 at page 15, line 31, Figure 11) and second (e.g., 74 at page 15, line 31, Figure 11) strips have corresponding inner peripheries, the gasket further comprising a third strip of said sealing material formed in a loop (e.g., 72 at page 15, line 30,

Figure 11), said third strip having an outer periphery that is less than the inner periphery of said first strip, and at least one inner spoke (e.g., 77 at page 15, line 32, Figure 11) of said sealing material extending between said third strip and said first strip.

The invention of claim 67 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

67. A gasket (e.g., 90 at page 16, line 10, Figure 12 or 70 at page 15, line 29, Figure 11) for providing a seal at the joint between a pair of pipe flanges (e.g., 12 and 14 at page 9, lines 7 - 8, Figure 5) for connecting one flange to the other, comprising:

a first strip of a material that is adapted for sealing which is formed in a loop and has an outer periphery (e.g., 72 at page 15, line 30, Figure 12 or 74 at page 15, line 31, Figure 11);

a second strip of said sealing material formed in a loop and having an inner periphery that is greater than the outer periphery of said first strip (e.g., 74 at page 15, line 31, Figure 12 or 76 at page 15, line 31, Figure 11); and

at least one spoke of said sealing material extending between said first strip and said second strip (e.g., 77 at page 15, line 32, Figure 11 or 12), the gasket further comprising a closed alignment spoke (e.g., 78 at

page 15, line 33, Figure 11 or 12) of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip, wherein said closed alignment spoke includes an aperture (80 at page 15, line 35) therethrough for receiving a bolt.

The invention of claim 68 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

68. The gasket of claim 67, further comprising a centering shelf (e.g., 162 at page 19, line 8, Figure 25) of said sealing material depending from said closed alignment spoke and extending so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of at least one of the flanges.

The invention of claim 69 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

69. The gasket of claim 68, wherein the flanges have corresponding inner and outer peripheries, wherein the outer periphery of one of the flanges is smaller than the outer periphery of the other of the flanges (e.g., 164, 166 at page 19, line 11, Figure 24), wherein the outer periphery of said second strip (e.g., 152 at page 18, line 37, Figure 24) is substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the smaller flange (164 at page 19, line 11, Figure 24), and wherein said centering shelf extends so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the larger flange (166 at page 19, line 11, Figure 24).

The invention of claim 73 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

73. The gasket of claim 67, wherein said first (e.g., 76 at page 15, line 31, Figure 11) and second (e.g., 74 at page 15, line 31, Figure 11) strips have corresponding inner peripheries, the gasket further comprising a third strip of said sealing material formed in a loop (e.g., 72 at page 15, line 30, Figure 11), said third strip having an outer periphery that is less than the inner periphery of said first strip, and at least one inner spoke (e.g., 77 at page 15, line 32, Figure 11) of said sealing material extending between said third strip and said first strip.

The invention of claim 74 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

74. The gasket of claim 67, wherein said closed alignment spoke has a tab portion (e.g., 160 at page 19, line 6, Figure 24 or 144 at page 19, line 5, Figure 25) that extends beyond the outer peripheries of the flanges.

The invention of claim 75 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

75. The gasket of claim 74, wherein said tab portion includes identification data (disclosure in claims as filed).

The invention of claim 76 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

76. The gasket of claim 60, further comprising a closed alignment spoke (e.g., 78 at page 15, line 33, Figure 11 or 12) of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip,

wherein said closed alignment spoke includes an aperture (80 at page 15, line 35) therethrough for receiving a bolt.

The invention of claim 77 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

77. The gasket of claim 76, further comprising a centering shelf (e.g., 162 at page 19, line 8, Figure 25) of said sealing material depending from said closed alignment spoke and extending so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of at least one of the flanges.

The invention of claim 78 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

78. The gasket of claim 77, wherein the flanges have corresponding inner and outer peripheries, wherein the outer periphery of one of the flanges is smaller than the outer periphery of the other of the flanges (e.g., 164, 166 at page 19, line 11, Figure 24), wherein the outer periphery of said second strip (e.g., 152 at page 18, line 37, Figure 24) is substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the smaller flange (164 at page 19, line 11, Figure 24), and wherein said centering shelf extends so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the larger flange (166 at page 19, line 11, Figure 24).

The invention of claim 82 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

82. A gasket (e.g., 70 at page 15, line 29, Figure 11 or 92 at page 16, line 15, Figure 13) for providing a seal at the joint between a pair of pipe flanges (e.g., 12 and 14 at page 9, lines 7 - 8, Figure 5) for connecting one flange to the other, comprising:

- a first strip of a material that is adapted for sealing which is formed in a loop and has an outer periphery (e.g., 72 at page 15, line 30, Figure 11 or 13);

- a second strip of said sealing material formed in a loop and having an inner periphery that is greater than the outer periphery of said first strip (e.g., 74 at page 15, line 31, Figure 11 or 13); and

- at least one spoke of said sealing material extending between said first strip and said second strip (e.g., 77 at page 15, line 32, Figure 11 and 13), further comprising an open alignment spoke (e.g., 94 at page 16, line 17, Figure 13) of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip, said open alignment spoke defining an alignment concavity (96 at page 16, line 18) for placement adjacent a fastener, further comprising a closed alignment spoke of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip (e.g., 78 at page 15, line

33, Figure 12), wherein said closed alignment spoke includes an aperture (80 at page 15, line 35) therethrough for receiving a bolt, wherein said first and said second strips have corresponding inner peripheries, the gasket further comprising a third strip of said sealing material formed in a loop (e.g., 72 at page 15, line 30, Figure 11), said third strip having an outer periphery that is less than the inner periphery of said first strip, and at least one inner spoke (77 at page 15, line 32, Figure 11) of said sealing material extending between said third strip and said first strip.

The invention of claim 83 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

83. The gasket of claim 76, wherein said closed alignment spoke has a tab portion (e.g., 160 at page 19, line 5, Figure 24) that extends beyond the outer peripheries of the flanges.

The invention of claim 84 reads on the specification and claims as follows:

84. The gasket of claim 83, wherein said tab portion includes identification data (disclosure in original claims).

The invention of claim 85 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

85. A gasket (e.g., 102 at page 16, line 32, Figure 15 or 98 at page 16, line 25, Figure 14)) for providing a seal at the joint between a pair of pipe flanges (e.g., 12 and 14 at page 9, lines 7 - 8, Figure 5) for connecting one flange to the other, comprising:

a first strip of sealing material formed in a loop and having an outer periphery (e.g., 72 at page 15, line 30, Figure 14 or 15);

a second strip of said sealing material formed in a loop and having an outer periphery and inner periphery greater than said outer periphery of said first strip (e.g., 100 at page 16, line 27, Figure 14 or 15); and

at least one spoke of said sealing material extending between said first strip and said second strip (e.g., 77 at page 15, line 32, Figure 14 or 15) wherein remaining spaces therebetween are substantially void, and wherein said outer periphery of said first strip is substantially circular and said outer periphery of said second strip is substantially square (Figure 14 or 15).

The invention of claim 87 reads on the specification and drawings as follows:

87. The gasket of claim 85, further comprising at least one closed alignment spoke of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip (78 at page 15, line 33, Figure 14), said alignment spoke including an aperture (80 at page 15, line 35) therethrough for receiving a bolt.

ISSUES

- (1) Whether the Examiner has shown, according to the requirements of the MPEP, that claim 55 is anticipated by Merwarth, U.S. Patent No. 605,891.
- (2) Whether the Examiner has shown, according to the requirements of the MPEP, that claims 60 - 62, 66 - 69, 73 - 78, 82 - 84 and 87 are obvious in view of Mastin, U.S. Patent No. 1,245,002 and Smith, U.S. Patent No. 4,002,344.
- (3) Whether the Examiner has shown, according to the requirements of the MPEP, that claim 85 is obvious in view of Mastin.

GROUPING OF CLAIMS

Issue (2) regards claims 60 - 62, 66 - 69, 73 - 78, 82 - 84, and 87. Claims 61, 62, 68, 69, 77 and 78 do not stand or fall with the other claims of this group.

Issue (1) *Whether the Examiner has shown, according to the requirements of the MPEP, that claim 55 is anticipated by Merwarth, U.S. Patent No. 605,891.*

Merwarth discloses packing for steam and hydraulic joints, and more particularly compressible soft-metal packings for such joints. At page 2, line 24, the specification begins to describe a packing device that consists of an inner soft-metal ring c⁹ and an “inclosing” holder or retaining-ring c¹, having integral eyes or loops c², and an outer soft-metal ring c³, the latter encircling the loops or eyes c² and soldered or otherwise secured thereto. The reference states that “[i]t may be desirable . . . in some cases to form the loops or eyes c² of a soft-metal rod or wire of the same size as the soft-metal rings c c³ . . . “ Page 2, lines 44 - 48.

When Applicant pointed out that the claimed strips and spoke are all formed of the same sealing material, the Examiner asserted that “[s]ince there is no disclosure which indicates the soft metal of the loops is [a] different [soft metal] than that of the spokes, it is considered inherent that they are the same”

Errors in the Rejection:

The Examiner’s position is expressly contradicted by MPEP 2112 which states: “The fact that a certain result or characteristic may occur or be present in the prior art is not sufficient to establish the inherency of that result of characteristic.” Rather, the claimed invention must necessarily result from the teachings of the prior art reference. Accordingly, the Examiner’s theory, that just because a reference does not state that two things are different they are inherently the same, is wrong. As just one example, it is perfectly consistent with the teachings of Merwarth to form the rings c⁹ and c³ of

copper wire and the “inclosing holder or retaining-ring c” of iron or nickel rod¹. Since it is possible to follow the teachings of the reference and fail to obtain the claimed invention, the rejection is improper according to the MPEP.

Though the above is believed to be dispositive, it is also pointed out that it is incorrect to assume that the rings and inclosing holder of Merwarth are equivalent to the claimed strips and spokes, because the rings and inclosing holder of Merwarth must still be joined to one another to form a gasket. This joining will in general require the use of some additional material. In that regard, Merwarth specifically suggests joining these parts with solder (page 2, lines 24 - 32). Solder² would partially coat the rings and inclosed holder and become integral with these parts³. Then, even if the same wire or rod (formed of the same soft-metal) is used for the rings and the inclosing holder, these parts will each have some portions that are not coated with solder, i.e., some portions that are formed of a material that consists of a given soft-metal wire or rod, and other portions that are coated with solder, i.e., portions formed of a material that manifestly includes solder. Wire or rod that is coated with solder is a different sealing material than wire or rod that is not coated with solder, so the gasket in Merwarth is taught as being formed of at least two different sealing materials.

¹ It may be noted that, even if the aforementioned parts are all formed of a single type of material (e.g., copper), they *may* still be formed of wire or rod having different sizes, in which case they will still not be *of the same sealing material* as claimed.

² Solder is typically a eutectic solid solution of lead and tin, and has a melting point that is lower than the melting point of the materials to be soldered, so solder is typically if not always formed of a different material than the parts to be soldered.

³ The alternative is to consider the solder to be a separate part between the inclosing holder and the rings, in which case the inclosing holder by itself could not be considered to meet claim 55's requirement for the claimed spoke of “extending between said first strip and said second strip.”

Why the Rejected Claim is Patentable Under 35 USC 102

The rejected claim is patentable under 35 USC 102 because none of the references of record expressly or inherently describe a gasket comprising a first strip of a sealing material, a second strip of the same sealing material, and at least one spoke of the same sealing material extending between the two strips wherein remaining spaces between the two strips are substantially void.

Issue (2) *Whether the Examiner has shown, according to the requirements of the MPEP, that claims 60 - 62, 66 - 69, 73 - 78, 82 - 84 and 87 are obvious in view of Mastin, U.S. Patent No. 1,245,002 and Smith, U.S. Patent No. 4,002,344.*

Errors in the Rejections

Appellant does not concede that there was any motivation in the prior art to combine Mastin and Smith. However, even assuming this motivation, *arguendo*, the Examiner has failed to show that the resulting combination yields the claimed invention.

Smith teaches a snap-in plastic locator ring which is snapped into a gasket for sealing. Mastin teaches a rubber gasket for sealing. Accordingly, combining these references according to their express teachings leads directly and unequivocally to a rubber gasket with a snap-in plastic locator ring, not a gasket having the features claimed.

The Examiner's proposed rationale for combining the references, i.e., "to provide a gasket which can be properly aligned between a variety of different sized flanges [and] which would provide an efficient seal at the inner and outer edges of the flanges as well as around the bolt holes," is satisfied entirely by (and motivates nothing more than) a rubber gasket having a snap-in plastic

locator ring, i.e., the straightforward combination of Mastin and Smith. The Examiner has provided no explanation for the required further recognition to form both the gasket and the locator ring of the same sealing material. Indeed, the snap-in locator ring is not used for sealing, so there is no apparent motivation in the prior art to form this part from sealing material at all.

When combining references to support a rejection based on obviousness where the references do not supply all of the teachings required to produce the claimed invention, MPEP 2144 requires the Examiner to present a convincing line of reasoning that the motivation to modify the references as proposed existed in the prior art. Since the Examiner has not presented *any* line of reasoning showing that the motivation existed in the prior art to further modify the combination of Mastin and Smith so that all parts of the gasket and locator ring combination would be formed of the same sealing material, the Examiner had not produced a *prima facie* case according to MPEP 2142, and the rejection was improper.

How the Limitations Noted Above Render the Claimed Subject Matter Unobvious Over the Prior Art

Without a *prima facie* case being proffered against the claims, Applicant had no obligation to justify their patentability or argue further according to MPEP 2142. While an argument is given below to satisfy the requirement of 37 CFR §1.192(c)(8)(iv), Appellant does not represent that there are not other reasons that the claims should be considered patentable.

Smith teaches a seal 21 that is installed between pipe flanges, the seal having an inner ring 22 and an outer annular ring 31 surrounding the inner ring 22. This part of Smith is the closest equivalent to the gasket of Mastin. Both the gasket of Mastin and Smith's seal 21 are adapted for

sealing. The function of sealing implies certain material properties or characteristics in the sealing material, depending on application.

Smith teaches providing, in addition, a locator ring 41 that is notched to permit a tab 56 to be “snapped off” after the flanges have been drawn tight. The function of providing for a snap-off or break-away feature also implies certain material properties or characteristics in the material used in the locator ring. Appellant submits that it is obvious that these properties or characteristics will be different than those for sealing material. For example, it is obvious from the teachings of Smith that a relatively brittle material should be selected for the locator ring 41 and a relatively compliant material should be selected for the seal 21. Therefore, where a gasket provides for both a sealing function and a locating function, Smith teaches that the gasket should employ separate parts formed of different materials having different material properties. Since the claimed invention requires that the locating function be provided by a feature formed of the same sealing material as the rest of the gasket, Smith actually teaches away from the claimed invention rather than rendering it obvious.

While all the dependent claims include additional features that are believed to add patentability to the base claims, the utter lack of any teaching or suggestion in the prior art for the centering shelf of claims 61, 62, 68, 69, 77 and 78 is especially apparent⁴ and is pointed out specifically.

⁴ These claims are separately patentable because there is no teaching, suggestion or motivation in the prior art to produce a gasket having a centering shelf depending from either an open or a closed alignment spoke.

Issue (3) *Whether the Examiner has shown, according to the requirements of the MPEP, that claim 85 is obvious in view of Mastin.*

Errors in the Rejection

The first error in the rejection is that the Examiner has never articulated the authority for it. The Examiner merely stated that “using a square shape is considered a design choice as applicant has not stated that . . . [this] solves any problem or is for any particular purpose.” Applicant presumed⁵ that the Examiner intended to cite MPEP 2144.04(I) (“Aesthetic Design Changes”) as authority for the rejection, asking the Examiner to indicate otherwise if that presumption was incorrect. The Examiner has not indicated otherwise, so Appellant takes MPEP 2144.04(I) as the basis for the rejection.

MPEP 2144.04(I) states that features relating to ornamentation only, which have no mechanical function, cannot be relied upon to patentably distinguish the claimed invention. Accordingly, under MPEP 2144.04, the Examiner would be entitled to ignore the express limitation that the gasket has a square outer periphery for purposes of determining patentability *if and only if* the square outer periphery has *no* mechanical function and relates to ornamentation *only*.

Applicant has pointed out that the square corners of the gasket would protrude from a suitably sized pipe joint employing round pipe flanges, providing a means to grasp the gasket for locating it between the pipe flanges, and that this is an obvious mechanical function. The Examiner agrees that this is a mechanical function, but argues that it nevertheless cannot be considered a

⁵ The Examiner did not cite MPEP 2144.04(I), but this section appeared to be more closely related to the Examiner’s arguments than any other authority that Applicant was able to find in the MPEP.

mechanical function under MPEP 2144.04(I) because (a) the function was not disclosed in the application, and (b) the function will not be available if the gasket is used in a pipe joint that is not suitably sized, i.e., wherein the pipe flanges are too large. It was error to maintain the rejections based on these unsupported and incorrect assertions.

The Examiner has been unable to cite any authority for either assertion (a) or (b) above. For that reason alone, the rejection should be reversed. Moreover, assertion (b) flatly contradicts the express language of MPEP 2144.04(I)⁶.

Moreover, there is case law against which the Examiner's assertions can be tested, some of which is found in MPEP Chapter 1500 dealing with design patents. The most prominent case cited there is *In re Carletti*, which is highly analogous to the rejection here because it involved the question of the functionality of particular features (concentric annular ribs) of a gasket. Importantly, both the Board and the court found functionality in that case.

They found functionality despite the fact that (a) there was no functionality disclosed in the patent application (it was a design patent application), and (b) the functionality (sealing by the concentric annular ribs) could be defeated if the gasket was used in a pipe joint that is not suitably sized for the gasket, i.e., wherein the pipe flanges are too large⁷. If the Examiner's assertions correctly state the law, the concentric annular ribs in *In re Carletti* would have been found to be

⁶ This is because it is inherent in assertion (b) that the feature at issue may have a mechanical function at least under certain circumstances, while MPEP 2144.04 states that the feature can be disregarded for purposes of determining patentability only if it has *no* mechanical function.

⁷ If the pipe flanges are too large for the gasket, the concentric annular ribs will not make contact with the flange faces, defeating their capability to function to effect a seal.

nonfunctional. Since these features were found to be functional despite (a) and (b), the Examiner's assertions are proved to be incorrect.

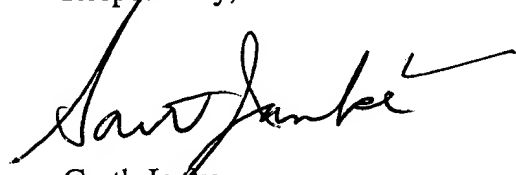
It is an inherent property of a square gasket that there are corners. It is obvious that these could be used for the useful purpose of grasping the gasket when it is installed between the typical, circular pipe flanges. This does not need to be stated in a patent application either to make it true or to make it clear. It was therefore improper for the Examiner to ignore an express claim limitation when comparing claim 85 with the prior art.

How the Limitations Noted Above Render the Claimed Subject Matter Unobvious Over the Prior Art

Claim 85 is not obvious because the prior art does not teach, motivate or suggest the claimed square outer periphery, and there is no allegation to the contrary.

For the reasons presented above, the Board is respectfully requested to reverse the rejections and direct the Examiner to pass this case to issue.

Respectfully, submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Garth Janke", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Garth Janke
Reg. No. 40,662

X:\DATA\WP51\CARR\APPEAL1.BRF



APPENDIX

55. A gasket for providing a seal at the joint between a pair of pipe flanges for connecting one flange to the other, comprising:

a first strip of a material that is adapted for sealing and formed in a loop and having an outer periphery;

a second strip of said sealing material formed in a loop and having an inner periphery that is greater than the outer periphery of said first strip; and

at least one spoke of said sealing material extending between said first strip and said second strip wherein remaining spaces therebetween are substantially void.

60. A gasket for providing a seal at the joint between a pair of pipe flanges and for connecting one flange to the other, comprising:

a first strip of a material that is adapted for sealing which is formed in a loop and has an outer periphery;

a second strip of said sealing material formed in a loop and having an inner periphery that is greater than the outer periphery of said first strip; and

at least one spoke of said sealing material extending between said first strip and said second strip, the gasket further comprising an open alignment spoke of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip, said open alignment spoke defining an alignment concavity for placement adjacent a fastener.

61. The gasket of claim 60, further comprising a centering shelf of said sealing material depending from said open alignment spoke and extending so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of at least one of the flanges.

62. The gasket of claim 61, wherein the flanges have corresponding inner and outer peripheries, wherein the outer periphery of one of the flanges is smaller than the outer periphery of the other of the flanges, wherein the outer periphery of said second strip is substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the smaller flange, and wherein said centering shelf extends so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the larger flange.

66. The gasket of claim 60, wherein said first and second strips have corresponding inner peripheries, the gasket further comprising a third strip of said sealing material formed in a loop, said

third strip having an outer periphery that is less than the inner periphery of said first strip, and at least one inner spoke of said sealing material extending between said third strip and said first strip.

67. A gasket for providing a seal at the joint between a pair of pipe flanges for connecting one flange to the other, comprising:

a first strip of a material that is adapted for sealing which is formed in a loop and has an outer periphery;

a second strip of said sealing material formed in a loop and having an inner periphery that is greater than the outer periphery of said first strip; and

at least one spoke of said sealing material extending between said first strip and said second strip, the gasket further comprising a closed alignment spoke of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip, wherein said closed alignment spoke includes an aperture therethrough for receiving a bolt.

68. The gasket of claim 67, further comprising a centering shelf of said sealing material depending from said closed alignment spoke and extending so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of at least one of the flanges.

69. The gasket of claim 68, wherein the flanges have corresponding inner and outer peripheries, wherein the outer periphery of one of the flanges is smaller than the outer periphery of the other of the flanges, wherein the outer periphery of said second strip is substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the smaller flange, and wherein said centering shelf extends so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the larger flange.

73. The gasket of claim 67, wherein said first and second strips have corresponding inner peripheries, the gasket further comprising a third strip of said sealing material formed in a loop, said third strip having an outer periphery that is less than the inner periphery of said first strip, and at least one inner spoke of said sealing material extending between said third strip and said first strip.

74. The gasket of claim 67, wherein said closed alignment spoke has a tab portion that extends beyond the outer peripheries of the flanges.

75. The gasket of claim 74, wherein said tab portion includes identification data.

76. The gasket of claim 60, further comprising a closed alignment spoke of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip, wherein said closed alignment spoke includes an aperture therethrough for receiving a bolt.

77. The gasket of claim 76, further comprising a centering shelf of said sealing material depending from said closed alignment spoke and extending so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of at least one of the flanges.

78. The gasket of claim 77, wherein the flanges have corresponding inner and outer peripheries, wherein the outer periphery of one of the flanges is smaller than the outer periphery of the other of the flanges, wherein the outer periphery of said second strip is substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the smaller flange, and wherein said centering shelf extends so as to be substantially congruent with the outer periphery of the larger flange.

82. A gasket for providing a seal at the joint between a pair of pipe flanges for connecting one flange to the other, comprising:

- a first strip of a material that is adapted for sealing which is formed in a loop and has an outer periphery;

- a second strip of said sealing material formed in a loop and having an inner periphery that is greater than the outer periphery of said first strip; and

- at least one spoke of said sealing material extending between said first strip and said second strip, further comprising an open alignment spoke of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip, said open alignment spoke defining an alignment concavity for placement adjacent a fastener, further comprising a closed alignment spoke of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip, wherein said closed alignment spoke includes an aperture therethrough for receiving a bolt, wherein said first and said second strips have corresponding inner peripheries, the gasket further comprising a third strip of said sealing material formed in a loop, said third strip having an outer periphery that is less than the inner periphery of said first strip, and at least one inner spoke of said sealing material extending between said third strip and said first strip.

83. The gasket of claim 76, wherein said closed alignment spoke has a tab portion that extends beyond the outer peripheries of the flanges.

84. The gasket of claim 83, wherein said tab portion includes identification data.

85. A gasket for providing a seal at the joint between a pair of pipe flanges for connecting one flange to the other, comprising:

- a first strip of sealing material formed in a loop and having an outer periphery;

- a second strip of said sealing material formed in a loop and having an outer periphery and inner periphery greater than said outer periphery of said first strip; and

- at least one spoke of said sealing material extending between said first strip and said second strip wherein remaining spaces therebetween are substantially void, and wherein said outer periphery of said first strip is substantially circular and said outer periphery of said second strip is substantially square.

87. The gasket of claim 85, further comprising at least one closed alignment spoke of said sealing material extending outwardly from said second strip, said alignment spoke including an aperture therethrough for receiving a bolt.